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CLEANING UP POLITICS IN AGEJO CITY
--A Christian's Personal Witness--

by Rev. Kazuo Domon

(The following article was published by Hatarakuhito April 18, 1975, in connection with local elections being conducted in April. The article was translated for JCAN by Helen Post. ---eds---)

My interest in the politics of Agejo in Saitama Prefecture, where I live, stems from a vote-buying scandal that occurred in the prefectural assembly.

When I came to Agejo United Church of Christ in Japan seven years ago, Agejo had a population of twenty or thirty thousand. Since then, the population has mushroomed to about 140,000. But nothing has been done to cope with the consequences of this rapid growth, and the incident a year ago (when angry passengers broke through the gates and smashed platform booths on the commuter line) shows the extent of dissatisfaction with the bureaucracy that operates the transportation system.

There has been a long history of collusion and a clearly ineffective, outdated system of city government. The threat created by the new residents' impatience with the old system brought about dishonest election procedures in which, in the 1971 spring elections, a candidate for the prefectural assembly made a payoff to members of the city council in the offices of the head of the council.

Immediately after the election, local newspapers gave the matter extensive coverage. Rejecting the image portrayed through the bad publicity, many citizens began to feel that something must be done.

At that time a church member, Jun Ishimoda, came to me saying, "The citizens can't remain silent on the matter of the election violations. But even if we appeal to people in the city who hold the power, they can't do a thing because of the complicated interpersonal relationships and long-standing loyalties. Isn't it up to us Christians, who don't have a vested interest in the government, to do it?" He spoke very urgently and pressed me to a decision to organize a reform movement.

In very short order a number of the newer members of the community came together and decided that, in a movement like this, it's not good to have a political party at the front but that we should make very clear its character as a citizens' movement.

Accordingly, we took as its name, Agejo Shisei o Kirei ni Suru Kai (The Association to Clean Up Agejo Politics), and I became chairman. We have, of course, had the support and cooperation of reform movements, labor, and citizens'

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groups.

On the problem of the social responsibility of Christians, the crux of the debate is whether social action stems from the fact that one is a Christian or from the fact that one is, first, a member of society and then a Christian. I became involved as a Christian ... Christianity has what is referred to as "salvation of the soul from inner problems." I think we must recognize the fact that today, by having stopped there, we have committed various grave mistakes of a social nature. I, as a Christian, am related to political activity in terms both of my mission and my responsibility as a Christian.

--Political Coloring--

Before this movement was organized, there were some people working for reform within existing political parties, but that effort died out. We did not organize as a parent organization, but we related to a wide range of citizens' organizations and, in turn, to the people in them. For that reason, the core was not a certain group of people holding particular positions of power. Rather, it was people who had no positions of power. The people and the political parties standing on reform platforms gave their support.

Because in citizens' movements the authority and desires of the people constitute the base, I think that one must have an organization that has no lines to any political party by which it stands to gain. It was precisely because our movement was a peoples' movement with no political coloring that it caught on.

The movement has a link with the church. However, it was started in such a hurry that there wasn't time to get official approval. Afterwards the official board decided to support it, and with that, many members of the church began to participate. In short, the movement had the support of the church but not its official support as a body.

First, as a preparatory group looking to the organization of "The Association to Clean Up Ageo Politics," nearly 200 citizens assembled in the conference room of the city office on May 16, 1971, and decided to hold a rally. There was only a short time until the rally was to be held, but the members all dedicated themselves to preparation and worked very hard, running here and there.

On May 25, at the plaza in front of the Japan National Railways Ageo Station, a peoples' rally was convened. More than 500 local people came, and it turned into a protest rally. A statement of protest adopted by the rally was given to the Government of the Prefecture, the mayor of the city, the head of the prefectural assembly and the head of the Association of City Council Members of the Liberal Democratic Party.

At the city council, the work of the citizens was reported and taken up. The council passed a resolution agreeing to "self-control" of the election campaigns. But, because this was another kind of deceptive action to camouflage dishonesty, we then presented a "Petition for Promoting Trials of Election Violators" to the Urawa District Court judge.

One result of this action was that members of the prefectural assembly who had been found guilty and sentenced for election violations were disqualified. And that year not one of the persons who had been involved in the vote-buying ran for reelection. The next year, 1972, the peoples' movement was successful in getting a reform mayor elected.

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CLEANING UP POLITICS (cont'd)

--New Group Formed--

Inasmuch as the original goal had been achieved, the Association to Clean Up Ageo Politics was disbanded. But there remained the problem of observing, as a peoples' movement, what the city council would do after this. So the Research Group on Ageo City Government, consisting of twenty people, was organized. About one-third of the members are Christians.

The research group, building on what had been learned from the earlier activities, was organized as an action group to study and make clear, from the citizens' side, the condition of the Ageo City government. The group seeks to point out problems, to make requests to correct them, and to see the results reflected in the administration of the city. In the three years since the study group was organized, it has investigated the administration of city finances, education, public works, sanitation and welfare.

With regard to this year's local elections, what we must consider this time is first what the City Council members and Prefectural Assembly members have done while in office. In this connection our study group has made concrete investigations of the work of the City Council and has evaluated and published its findings.

Secondly, we must watch to see whether the assembly members connected with the past violations attempt to run for office again. Third, there is a movement now by the research group to have a public dental clinic established; 100,000 names have already been secured on petitions for this. We want to ask the candidates what they think about the plan, and make their positions known to the citizens.

I think the church and Christians have a responsibility to observe the local government where the church is located and where Christians live, and to take responsibility for it. To the extent that we are related to the local government, issues will emerge one after another. For that very reason, our responsibility is great.

The church, Mr. Ishimoda and I were called "red", but I want to try not to give in to that kind of talk. By doing what we are, I believe we are witnessing to Christ.

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CHRISTIANS PROTEST ROK HANGINGS

American missionaries in Seoul, the Emergency Committee on Korea in Tokyo and Amnesty International in London have joined a groundswell of protest against the south Korean government's execution of eight alleged "communists" on April 9. After 11 months of confirmed torture and highly irregular military court procedures, the eight men were hanged for their alleged involvement in the so-called "People's Revolutionary Party."

Five Protestant and two Catholic missionaries in south Korea protested the U.S. government's "quiet diplomacy" in an April 16 demonstration. Wearing black hoods and ropes around their necks the seven staged a silent vigil inside the U.S. Embassy compound. In a letter addressed to the U.S. ambassador, they said:

"We ask for clarification of U.S. government intentions regarding the deterioration of human rights in Korea and request that it continue its economic and military assistance to the Republic of Korea only to the extent that such

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CHRISTIANS PROTEST ROK (cont'd)

assistance contributes to the realization of freedom and human rights.

"We are aware that the U.S. State Department has expressed deep regret over the executions and the manner in which they were carried out. It seems inadequate to continue merely expressing regret, however, as the Korean government gives no indication that it any longer pays attention to such words," they said.

Within hours all seven men were picked up by Korean authorities and taken to the Seoul Immigration Office where they were grilled until late in the evening. The officials were apparently seeking grounds on which to charge the missionaries with violation of Korean laws. An American consular official present during the interrogations reportedly told the Korean officials that the demonstration had been legal and that the Embassy had been notified in advance and had granted permission.

The ROK government officially cancelled the Thursday Morning Prayer Meeting scheduled for April 17. At least three of the new widows had planned to attend the prayer meeting, and the government was afraid this might stir up new trouble for the Park regime. Shortly after the April 10 prayer meeting, three leaders of the weekly service were taken in by the Korean CIA. Their interrogations were continuing one week later.

The Emergency Committee on Korea, comprised of Japanese lawyers, researchers and church leaders, decried the executions in a press conference in Tokyo April 15. The Rev. John Nakajima, General secretary of the National Christian Council of Japan and a member of the group, expressed the fear that the executions are being followed by renewed ROK government suppression of Korean Christians. "The Korean churches struggled valiantly to protect the human and legal rights of the eight men," said Nakajima, "but at least a dozen church leaders have been arrested and harassed in the past week for making this most basic Christian witness." Among those arrested was the Rev. Kim Kwan Suk, general secretary of the National Council of Churches of Korea (see JCAN #472, April 18).

Amnesty International, in an April 9 letter from its general secretary to the ROK government, said it "strongly protests" the executions. "The government of the Republic of Korea is aware that the evidence presented publicly against the eight men has been judged to be questionable by independent observers and has been vigorously challenged in South Korea and internationally," said Martin Ennals of Amnesty International's Secretariat in London.

"The haste with which the men have been executed is particularly regrettable because, under Korean law, a stay of execution could have been affected by an appeal for clemency or for re-trial," said Ennals. He noted that the public prosecutor had assured an A.I. lawyer in Seoul that the men would not be executed before such an appeal. Amnesty also expressed its "grave concern" for the welfare of the dead men's wives. The wives, despite their own experiences of torture, publicly exposed many of the irregularities in their husbands' trials. Korean Christians and missionaries are also deeply concerned that the government may next try to "silence" the anguished cries of the widows.

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NEW YASUKUNI SHRINE BILL PROPOSED

The Yasukuni Shrine nationalization issue is still very much alive after six years of political maneuverings by the ruling Liberal-Democratic Party (LDP). The latest maneuver came in mid-March when a special committee of the LDP changed the name but not the real nature of its bill to nationalize the Shinto Shrine

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NEW YASUKUNI BILL (cont'd)

in Tokyo which is dedicated to the war dead.

The bill being presented to the current 75th session of the Diet is called "Hyokei Hoan" or "Bill to Pay Respect." The bill would permit: (1) the Emperor, heads of both houses of the Diet, Supreme Court judges and persons responsible for foreign affairs to pay official visits to the shrine for purposes of worship; (2) foreign heads of state to pay tribute at the shrine; and (3) Self-Defense Forces' guards to worship at the shrine.

Masayuki Fujio, chairman of the Lower House Cabinet Committee and a right-wing "hawk" in the LDP, spearheaded the drive to introduce the new bill. One of Fujio's tactics, designed to defuse the militaristic image of the shrine, is to authorize the shrine to hold memorial services not only in honor of the war dead but also such civil workers such as policemen and firemen who died in the line of duty.

Critics of the bill point out that "official state visits" to the shrine by the Emperor would be a de facto nationalization of the controversial shrine. The Emperor has visited the shrine since World War II, but the visit was not "official". He has not visited the shrine since the first shrine nationalization bill was proposed in 1969.

Opponents of the nationalization efforts are also convinced that visits to the shrine by foreign heads of state would be a serious blow to their movement for peace and for freedom of religion. The current bill was proposed at a time when Queen Elizabeth was reportedly considering a visit to Yasukuni Shrine. On March 11 Takaaki Aikawa, Chairman of the NCCJ, and Tomomi Kimura, Chairman of the Special Committee Concerned with Yasukuni Shrine, wrote to Her Majesty requesting that she not visit the shrine during her early May visit to Japan. The Queen has since announced that she will not visit Yasukuni Shrine but will visit Ise Shrine, where the Emperor's ancestors are enshrined. The NCCJ, while wary that the Ise visit may be used for political purposes, is not formally protesting that visit.

Christians feel that the government, having given up on Yasukuni Shrine bills as presented in the past, intends the new bill as a "trial balloon" for new and more subtle strategies. There are reports that the government may be designing an even more subtle bill for presentation later this year, after a questionnaire is sent out to some 30,000 family units to test their sentiment regarding Yasukuni. These maneuvers indicate that the government is not terribly serious about pushing the current bill, but Japanese Christians are aware that the government may be giving this impression so that, like last year, the bill can be rammed through Diet committees while opponents are caught off-guard.

On April 7 more than 50 church leaders from 20 denominations met at the NCCJ to consider the Yasukuni Shrine problem. In a statement they urged the LDP to "stop introducing any kind of bill which results in political interference in religion." They also urged member churches to continue to show their "deep concern over this issue, and to work for the establishment of freedom of faith in Japan."

On April 29, the Emperor's birthday, Christians will gather at 2 pm at Shinanomachi Church in Tokyo to study and to demonstrate their stand in opposing the bill.

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Headline-Making Events

compiled by C. Coriyama

THE EBBTIDE OF CONSERVATISM AND THE CONFUSION OF REFORMISM---The season for the

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HEADLINES

election of members of local and prefectural assemblies, mayors and governors, as well as the heads of government for Tokyo, Osaka, and Kanagawa, is at hand.

The first stage was the election on April 13. Rural areas elected as prefectural governors conservatives related to the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), currently in power. However, Tokyo, Osaka, and Kanagawa Prefecture in which Yokohama is located, elected as governors reformists related to the opposition parties. The tendency for the urban areas to go reformist and the rural areas to go conservative has been evident since the last election for National Diet members. However, an outstanding feature of the recent local elections was that many conservative candidates tried to dissociate themselves from the governing LDP by claiming the backing of the "citizens' party." This type of strategy on the part of conservative candidates was only to be expected in light of the people's increasing distrust of the LDP since the resignation of former Prime Minister Kakuei Tanaka caused by open suspicions concerning the accumulation of his personal wealth. At the same time, candidates, aware of the slowdown in Japan's world-famous high rate of economic growth and the heightened political consciousness of the citizens, chose slogans which confused the differences between conservatism and reformism. As a result, voters ended up by giving a vote of confidence to incumbent governors.

From the point of view of the opposition parties it can be said that this extended reformist power, helping to elect for the first time a reformist governors of Tokyo and Osaka. However, the struggle for leadership among the four opposition parties (the Democratic Socialist Party, the Socialist Party, the Communist Party, and the Clean Government Party related to the Buddhist Soka Gakkai) has intensified. At present, particularly in the cities, all these groups as well as the LDP are at a standoff confronting each other with about the same degree of strength. The above indicates that Japanese politics is in transition from a period of opposition between the conservatives and the reformists to one of a flood of small parties. (translated by John Krummel)

SPECIAL NOTE TO TEACHERS OF ENGLISH---The English tape recording of Dorothy and George Ogle's talks in Tokyo February 11 on conditions in Korea are available in the April 1975 issue of The English Journal. The English text and Japanese translation come in the accompanying magazine.

Included in this issue of the "monthly magazine of sound," the recording may be useful to English discussion classes interested in content for discussion and reflection. Available at bookstores like Maruzen.

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CORRECTION: The lead story in JCAN # 471, March 28, entitled "Relief Activities Prolong War," includes a major error of fact. In the middle of the third paragraph of the story, the sentence, "In 1967 at the peak of the Vietnam War its expenditures reached \$685 million, dropping to \$250 million in 1973," should be changed to read, "AID's annual budgets exceed one billion dollars." JCAN regrets the error, which was caused by misleading information from the USIS office in Tokyo. We also regret that later information supplied by USIS fails to show precise figures for the AID's total current funding. We presume that accurate totals are available in Washington.